



# Leaders from area colleges discuss STEM education

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Northern New Mexico is home to five colleges and universities, all of which share a common goal: higher education. So it's no surprise that leaders from these institutions continue to identify ways to collaborate (rather than compete) on how to increase their science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) program involvement for local students *and* area employers. This collaboration was the main goal of an October 18 roundtable meeting at Buffalo Thunder Resort in Pojoaque.

"The purpose of this meeting was to further discuss higher education STEM programs that are available to our students and to discuss how to develop a regional strategy that will help support our colleges, students, and the Laboratory's workforce needs," explains Carole Rutten of the Laboratory's Community Partnerships Office.

A major topic of discussion was supplementing STEM education with job opportunities at the Lab. "Higher education institutions need to have greater project-based learning opportunities for students," Rutten explains. "The group would like supplemental experiences that keep students excited and engaged as they pursue STEM degrees. This will help students better understand the job opportunities available to them once they graduate."

Northern New Mexico College President Rick Bailey speaks to Lab Director Charlie McMillan before the Presidents' Roundtable on October 18.

One way students can learn about STEM programs and events—not just at the Laboratory, but also across the region—is through Laboratory employees who volunteer at such programs and events. Formally called Science Education Community Service Time (SECST), this type of volunteering allows Lab employees to have up to 32 hours annually in support of K-20 STEM education initiatives. In 2015, Lab employees served more than 3,300 hours in more than 110 STEM programs. (To [learn more about SECST or to request a volunteer](#), or email [Carole Rutten](#).)

A second topic of conversation at the roundtable was working with regional school superintendents and principals to create a K-20 pipeline to develop a local STEM workforce. "[New Mexico First](#) has been contacted and Executive Director Heather Balas is eager and excited to provide the support needed to accomplish these goals in partnership with our team," says Rutten, noting that a contract will likely be in place this month. "Based on the progress of work, we may consider looking at this work as a pilot that can be either replicated or enhanced throughout the state."

The next presidents' roundtable is scheduled for later this month. Stay tuned for further developments and opportunities as STEM education continues to be a priority for local colleges and universities.

Attendees included Sam Minner, president of New Mexico Highlands University; Mariano Ulibarri, STEM coordinator at New Mexico Highlands University; Francisco Apodaca, STEM coordinator at Luna Community College; Cindy Rooney, CEO of UNM-Los Alamos; Randy Grissom, president of Santa Fe Community College; Rick Bailey, president of Northern New Mexico College; Domingo Sanchez, vice president of Northern New Mexico College; Ivan Lopez, interim provost of Northern New Mexico College; Kristen Henderson from the Regional Coalition of LANL Communities; Andrea Romero from the Regional Coalition of LANL Communities; Katie Richardson from Senator Martin Heinrich's office; Michelle Jacques-Ortiz from Senator Tom Udall's office; Mariana Padilla from Michelle Lujan Grisham's office; Patrick Duran from Ben Ray Lujan's office; C.J. Bacino from human resources at Los Alamos National Laboratory; Kathy Keith, director of the Community Partnerships Office at Los Alamos National Laboratory; Carole Rutten from the Community Partnerships Office at Los Alamos National Laboratory; and Randy Merker from the Community Partnerships Office at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

**Los Alamos National Laboratory**

**[www.lanl.gov](http://www.lanl.gov)**

**(505) 667-7000**

**Los Alamos, NM**

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